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The trouble with most of what Socrates said is that most of what we hear him saying we hear only in the dialogues Plato wrote and as everyone knows, Socrates never said what Plato has him say in the dialogues. The dialogues are fiction. Plato says this himself. He describes conversations he doesn't even claim to have been at. He made them up.

In a too little known passage of his *Memorabilia*, Xenophon recalls walking with Socrates and coming upon two young men kissing. One of them was very beautiful and Xenophon remembers Socrates remarking that the other was very brave to kiss him.

Xenophon reports himself as answering: "I wish I were that brave. I'd love to kiss that guy." His candour is part of what makes Xenophon so credible and with still more candour, he records how Socrates chided him.

"Don't be stupid Xenophon. That kind of beauty drives people mad. It's like the bite of a tarantula."

Xenophon then records his own feeble efforts at philosophy. "But Socrates, I objected," Xenophon says, "a tarantula injects something under the skin."

"Exactly," Xenophon tells us Socrates replied. "Beauty works at a distance. It doesn't even have to touch you to inject its poison."

I think we are actually hearing the voice of Socrates here. I don't think Xenophon made this story up. I don't think he could have. He's not smart enough. Xenophon is telling us what he remembers.

Another too little known passage from the *Memorabilia* is about Socrates meeting with Theodoté, a beautiful woman lately come to Athens. Someone told Socrates about her beauty and said it could not be captured in words.

"Well," said Socrates, "then we have to go and see her."

So they went to Theodoté's house and found her posing for a painter. When the sitting had concluded, Socrates asked: "Who do you think has had the greater pleasure, we because Theodoté has shown us her beauty or she because we have seen it?"

Theodoté liked this and she got to talking with Socrates about how she got men to support her, how she drew them into her web. She invited Socrates to come and visit her.

Xenophon says Socrates, who never had any practical business to take care of, claimed to be too busy. He said girls were always coming to see him to learn about love potions.

“Ah,” said Theodoté, “maybe you should lend me one of your spells so I can draw you in.”

“By God,” Socrates said, “I don’t wish to be drawn into your web. You come visit me.”

“Alright,” Theodoté said. “I’ll come visit you, but only if you’ll welcome me.”

“Oh,” Socrates said, “I’ll welcome you alright ... unless I’ve got someone more desirable inside.”

In an even lesser known (indeed, till now completely unknown) passage in the *Memorabilia*, Xenophon recalls walking and talking with Socrates. Plato and Alcibiades were with them. They came around a corner and saw a young boy sitting on the ground, splashing in a puddle and yelling wildly to everyone who was around.

“Look at this!” the kid was calling excitedly. “Look at this! Look at this!” You could tell by his Greek and his clothing, Xenophon says, that he came from the back of beyond.

Socrates walked over and asked the kid: “Look at what?”

“At this!” The boy said, slapping the puddle. The water spread out and then flowed back together. “See. Water goes downhill! Whatever you do to it, it goes downhill.”

Socrates thought for a moment and then asked: “Do you know why it goes downhill?”

The boy looked up at Socrates as if the question had never occurred to him before. “No.” he asked. “Why?”

Socrates smiled, shrugged, threw up his shoulders, elbows and hands in a gesture familiar to Xenophon and said. “I don’t know.” Then he turned to walk away.

The boy grabbed at Socrates’ leg. “Hey wait a minute,” he pleaded. “Tell me, mister! Tell me! Why does water go downhill?”

Xenophon says Plato stepped forward and grabbed the kid by the ear. “Hey! You Macedonian pipsqueak! That’s Socrates! Take your hands off him!”

The kid clung to Socrates’ leg, ignoring Plato. “Please, mister,” he asked Socrates again. “Why does it do that?”

Plato twisted the kid’s ear and the kid screamed. “Oww! That hurts.”

Plato said: “Maybe it only seems to hurt, kid. Maybe if you knew what was good for you, you’d realize it didn’t hurt and if you know what’s good for you,” he added twisting harder, “you’ll take your hands off Socrates!” Xenophon remarks parenthetically that Plato always exhibited a very proprietary air toward Socrates. In Greek, this is “he always treated Socrates as *his* Socrates.”

“Don’t be nasty to the little fellow,” Xenophon reports Socrates as saying. “Everyone loves learning.”

“Not as well much as we do,” said Alcibiades. “We have golden souls.”

Xenophon notes that Socrates was besmitten with Alcibiades (you know, poisoned by Cupid’s dart, from afar), but says this remark by Alcibiades made Socrates come as close to losing his cool as Xenophon ever saw him come.

“What is wrong with you, Alcibiades?” Xenophon records Socrates as saying. “Only a conceited fool would say of himself that he had a golden soul. You couldn’t trust anyone who thought that way. He’d stab you in the back and expect you to thank him for it.”

Plato was so happy to hear Alcibiades getting chewed out that he twisted the kid's ear without even being aware he was doing it. "Oww!" the boy yelled. "That hurts!"

The yell broke the spell, or rather recreated it. Freshly besotted, Socrates forgot his objections to what Alcibiades had said and stepping close to the beautiful young man, he stroked his soft cheek and rearranged the curls that framed the perfect oval of his face. "Alcibiades," Socrates said, letting one finger rest lightly on the full, red, shapely lips, "you'll be the death of me."

At this change, Plato gave the kid's ear an even harder twist and the kid jumped up from the ground, complaining angrily. "Hey! That hurts! Cut it out!"

Plato twisted even harder. "Are you sure it hurts? Maybe it's good for you."

"Yeah! And maybe this is good for you," the boy replied, kicking Plato where it hurts the most.

Plato let go of the boy's ear (Xenophon says, "he dropped it like a hot olive".) and fell, writhing, to the ground, clutching at his private parts. The boy ran off. Xenophon says he, Alcibiades and Socrates laughed at the pathetic figure on the ground and then Socrates said: "Plato, that boy's got more sense than you do."

Soon after Plato had recovered himself, Xenophon tells us, the boy returned with his mother, yelling: "That's him. That's the one."

The boy's mother, whom Xenophon describes as "a Macedonian Amazon with wild red hair and a great beak of a nose," strode up to Plato, slapped him across the face spit at his feet and said. "I curse you! May the gods give you the gift of sounding smart while having nothing to say." Then, she turned to Socrates and said: "I curse you too, old man. May the gods turn your teachings to poison on your lips." Then she addressed the crowd that had gathered. She spit on the ground. "I curse Athens. May the gods give my son a student who will wipe your memory off the face of the earth."

The identity of the boy from Macedonia is anyone's guess.